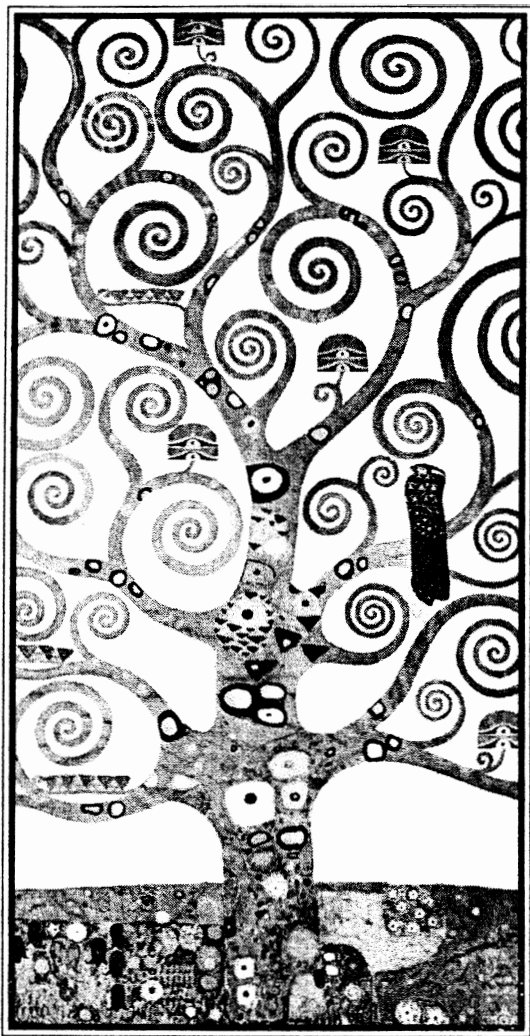


EGOIST



ECOLOGIES

EGOIST ECOLOGIES

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Welcome to Your World: a Collection of Egoist Ecologies

1. Expansive Reading

Where are you at this moment? Probably somewhere in a city. Or perhaps you have chosen a rural living situation, seeking to escape Babylon for an existence that at least *feels* closer to life. As we at Enemy Combatant feel, *where* and *how* you read something will affect how you absorb and put it to use. Yet at times reading itself makes for a sort of total escape – as for me, I’ve managed to read on metros, planes, in fields, forests, or my wood shop, with negligible variations on distraction. But that’s certainly not to say that reading Nietzsche on a desert cliff could ever compare to reading him from an electronic device in Central Park.

What I seek in an engagement with written material is an *expansive* mode of thinking – to achieve thoughts that can reach out and touch new things, to see unseen sides of the familiar, and to break up the rigid patterns of my mind. For this, the *act* of reading must itself be expansive. If Nicolas Carr pointed to the technology of printing as the one that nurtured the meditative, focused thought of reading and writing, well, there’s one technology I *will* embrace. The potential the printed word has on our expansiveness is undeniable – who hasn’t read something that changed their life, particularly among anarchists?

So despite the constant appeals for the value of the internet, and even conceding its usefulness *at times* and only then if carefully keeping it *at arms length*, I maintain that the reflection, attention, and care put into both reading and writing *print on paper* is unparalleled.

Instead of an extension of “technology”, then, I’d contend that much of the material Enemy Combatant (EC) offers may be likened more accurately to a mating call. Being fond of what little is left of the non-human world (many of us at EC spend a good deal of time there – preferring it as we do to the human world!) the metaphor strikes me (lowly printer and sometimes translator for EC) as appropriate. It came to me one night while composing this piece, hearing both owl and coyote calling out nearby. Mating calls? Perhaps not, so let’s call them *songs to the night*. The point is that I view propaganda efforts such as this as at once: a way to express myself, a provocation to the night, and a means to see whether any other coyote or night owls might call out in response.

We also have a notion that writing is an uncertain alchemy – a simple act of disinterested spell casting. If in some far off, remote time and place another is thrilled with the allure of one of these corrosive spells, and it brings this person some greater understanding and fills them with poetic liberation – aside from the immediate joy of the casting, this is our only immeasurable measure of success.

In the end, one might say the project or ‘purpose’ of EC is to wage war on purposes. Our aim is to offer texts that corrode the belief in the *Human Project* and all of its smooth-talking adherents. This collection is one rough effort to this end.

2. An egoist walks into a forest...

To dispense with the pleasantries, it should be more or less clear that this pamphlet tends to the side of provocation. Egoism is criticized for lacking an ‘ecological’ perspective, and if it isn’t dismissed as a recent iteration of hipster theory-aesthetic, then it is lazily accused of being ‘too close’ to contemporary right-wing libertarian individualism. Perhaps the former is anecdotally true, and the latter might at least be a fair *observation* – as opposed to a tacit *conviction* as it is often intended and received. This pamphlet seeks to point out that egoism, as a set of ideas and by extension those interested in and provoked by it, isn’t either of these things, and offers insights on how we interact with the non-human world out there. At any rate, the authors herein don’t toe the party lines of *any* anarcho-sect.

The provocation side of this pamphlet partly operates on the text of arguments ‘against’ egoism, rather than the less than rational subtexts (be they sectarian or interpersonal). These arguments are generally structured along lines of division: egoism vs. primitivism; social anarchism vs. nihilism; and green anarchism vs. well, itself. Though they seem like ‘theoretical’ divisions, the lines used to draw them are not necessarily rational – as an examination of some examples would show.¹ If you feel you tend to one or the other sides of these binaries, or are at least compelled by the discourse the opposition itself has generated, well, read on. Otherwise, find here an *in medias res* introduction to a rather lively debate that rages on amongst anarchists.¹

What will hopefully come across with the range of voices in these essays is that egoism operates, like all ideas, as an *influence*, and that when any single set of ideas becomes codified into a *position*, it loses, in becoming

1. For examples listen to Anarchy Radio for John Zerzan’s weeklies against egoism and nihilism – they usually come down to: egoism is narcissism (textually false on a basic level); and nihilism is hopelessness (most contemporary nihilist writing cannot be so easily simplified). At one time JZ insisted that Wolfi Landstreicher never used the term “domestication”, a term that appears throughout his writings, including an essay directly cited by Zerzan.

political, its anarchistic vigor. Moreover, when our egoist ideas cross-pollinate with experiences in the non-human world, then our critique of civilization, domestication, and our existence under contemporary society can explode into an expansiveness that exceeds ourselves – nothing short of such a *corrosive consciousness* can destroy the walls and character armor so carefully welded into our minds and our worlds by aeons of authority.

3. In which a wild hare and well-combed arguments tangle

What all of the aforementioned divides imply, in my view, is not a rational but, let's say, a spiritual divide, and thus gets overlooked in these discussions. It would be easy to chock them up to the cults of personality in the anarchist subculture, but this is *too* easy. After numerous conversations with anarchists among my friends, at events I've attended such as bookfairs and Earth First! gatherings, and on (yes) anarchistnews.org, it has occurred to me that these disagreements often circulate around the question of activism. Without these mostly face-to-face experiences, I could write off this whole dispute as purely the work of John Zerzan. But in these situations, what becomes clear in the interactions is a dramatic difference in worldview. Last year I ran into some eco-activists and began telling them about EC Publications. One of them stopped me, clearly annoyed, to ask whether I knew "how bad" things are (implying clear cuts, global warming, pipelines, etc.). Now to avoid reiterating the old argument against activism, I will say that I have been that eco-activist in the past – solemn, serious, and single-minded. After years of wasted energy, disgust with leftists, and scarcely a tree saved (a few cut down by others on "my side" of one campaign puts that count in the negative!), I've decided to focus my energies elsewhere. Others are free to do what they wish. Clearly, though, the fact that I had chosen to refocus my energies meant I was a *deserter* or else a normal person, perfectly and ignorantly comfortable with the status quo. There's usually no convincing such a person to see things any other way (I've made the futile attempt a number of times).

The activist mindset clearly puts some distance between myself and those who are still 'engaged'. The way that the typical of activist views the field of his action imposes in her mind a demand on those with whom he interacts. Egoist ideas have pushed me to consider how my perceived scope of action and my worldview may or may not align, cohere, reinforce, empower, intensify, inspire or articulate one another. It's also made me pay more attention to how others view these things. When I look back at when I took part in forest defense, I now see that for all of my knowledge, will, and effort, my scope of ability was out of alignment with my *perceived* scope. Turns out, while admirable, taking on the international timber industry amounted to a series of quixotic adventures (they were certainly joyful, delightful, and rebellious adventures – *quixotic victories*, in a word, and I embrace them for it).

Turning back to Anarcho-Primitivism (AP), its current figureheads, John Zerzan and Kevin Tucker, would like us to adopt *worldviews* that go far beyond our own or any other living human's lived experience as a way to inform our anarchist way of speaking, being, and agreeing. As the two often repeat, there are certain concrete things we cannot know from living and being that we must learn and adopt (for example; what is *in our bones*, how primitive societies operated, what ecological 'balance' historically is, how domestication, technology and civilization developed and why they are *the* enemies and must at all times be explicitly named – stone tools included!). This aspect of the divide is *political*, in the orthodox and sectarian senses of the word. Acceptance from or agreement with certain adherents of AP relies on expressing the shared politic. What's unfortunate about this divide is that it is usually insurmountable, hostile, and (perhaps most egregiously) resistant to *expansiveness*.

All the same, many of the critiques of technology as offered by AP are very close to me. I have certainly gained supreme insight from reading *Elements of Refusal* and *Origins*. I live with less technology than most of the people around me, save a few respectable (and *non-AP*) friends – no cell phone, no facebook, dial-up internet, and hand-tools only in my garden. I make compromises, but they are begrudging admissions to how I'm forced to relate to the Human Project.

4. In which the expansive egoist learns about entropy

While the supposed schisms between egoism and other strains of anarchist thought are interesting to me, there are limitations to what they offer in terms of liberatory ideas. Once again to point out that in my view egoist ideas are *operative* and *expansive*. By *operative* I mean that taking a notion like 'spooks' for example, while not insisting on the existence of anything – there is no archaeological evidence of them, for starters! – operates as an interpretive suggestion: is the way I conceptualize "nature" a reification, a spook? Does this reification mediate my relationships? If so, this way of thinking is not mine, and I would do well to free myself from it. In doing so, I learn to see the streams, trees, the animals I hunt and listen to, the insects that help and hurt in my garden, indeed my own intestinal flora, as part of the infinite expansive whole² of the present, rather than categorized components in some textbook world, *Nature*. By observation, attentive experimentation, and a commitment to respecting the life around me however I can, I can take part in what's around me directly.

2. I view the concept "whole" as paradoxical. Anything viewed as whole is nonetheless subject to interaction with outside forces; it is thus neither static nor whole.

This movement was aided by egoist ideas, but remains independent of them. As I learn about and observe the goings-on in my region, neither the concept “nature” nor the idea I have of Max Stirner are of immediate use in my thinking. Nevertheless, both have been important steps along the way. But if I were to attempt to apply these abstractions while hunting, gardening, or fashioning a new tool, they would be impediments! (What does Stirner know about sharpening scythe blades? And if I were to worry that I was reinforcing Symbolic Thought!?)

In my process of liberation, there is a great deal of learning to be done. There also entails a great respect for the life around me and a desire to know how others have developed healthy relationships to the land. This is my starting point for opposition to the state, industry, and institutional relationships that have for time immemorial been used to convince individuals that obedience to them is in the best interest of all. Despite an awareness of my unique and limited perspective on 10,000 year old matters, I can see that obedience and servitude, however they have spread among humans, are singly antithetical to life, health and joy. Insofar as such a claim has any worth, moreover, I would contend that obedience alone has caused more harm than “selfish behavior.”

It is not new that some anarchists seek abstractions on which to base their thinking – rather than continuing to ask questions, resisting conclusions and keeping the balance of curiosity and hostility that forms some of the most unique and inspired anarchist ideas –

So read on, laugh, disagree, start a fire with the pamphlet or an argument with your friend – but send us your thoughts – if you can find us!

– vincent félix

Living and Breathing Anarchy: Relationships of the Unique Against Organized Deadness

by Invecchiare Selvatico

“You know that old trees just grow stronger, and old rivers grow wilder everyday, but old people just grow lonesome waiting for someone to say hello in there”

- John Prine

The following fragments have been translated and transcribed from the scribblin’s and ramblin’s found in a secluded winter cabin:

In many vital and profound ways, it could be said that we are animated into this haphazardly confusing journey alone and finish our last stroke in much the same solitary way.....from the rhythmic rockin’ of the cradle to the somber rolling of the Hearse, the goin’ up, the comin’ down, darkness to light and back to darkness and all the gray-spotted matters in between, our paths are our own.....what we wander through and wonder in, however, is another matter. We are the core of our universe, our own unique self, our subjective peculiar being that only we truly understand and that we owe the only ultimate allegiance to and authority over. Our pleasures, pains, sustenance, ideas, projects, and entrance into relations are ultimately our own responsibilities. While we are effected by an infinite array of factors, ultimately, we are the source of our own joy, power, and despair. This much, I would say, makes sense to me, how I see it. This is essential in being an anarchist and provider of our own freedom, autonomy, directions, and perspectives. In this way, one might view themselves as an Egoist, that is if dependence on and defense of a singular philosophical perspective and theoretical underpinning were necessary or even helpful in one’s own personal project of freedom. And, while a healthy injection of this sort of deeply articulated individualism has been a well-needed tonic in the growingly dogmatic, often humanist (not to mention humorless), and in general fairly limited discourse in anti-civilization ideas, and especially useful for what is basically still a Leftist-leaning anarchist scene in the U.S., Egoism, however, from my perspective, as it has primarily been expressed in contemporary anarchist circles, seems to tend towards some unfortunate shortcomings and specific limitations in our lives as individuals coming into contact with others and as part of a larger project in conflict with civilization.

After a little while, with a certain cynically tarnished ear and crookedly suspicious eye perhaps, much of the published work and conversations with some Egoists begin, at times, to sound more like a four year-old child’s first day at daycare interpreted through a typewriter, a poetically verbose

dictionary, and the torn and tattered pages of texts written by some old dead wing-nut named Max. Whatever, that's fine.....daycare sucks, infantile indoctrination, other pissie diapers, lots of spilt milk, and mama nowhere to be found. And, I appreciate wing-nuts (those who obsessively go against specific grains from certain agendas) of all sorts and stripes, as long as they leave enough space for my own unique insanity and personal response to the omni-present domesticated order we move in opposition to daily. So, getting beyond Egoist rhetoric seems useful and healthy for an overall critique and lived activity against civilization. But, meanwhile, the primitivist party-line continues to declare too absolutely the parameters of discourse, conflict, and direction, often insisting on not only the terms of engagement with the problem, but also how we define them.....using at times what seems like some sort of anthropological progressivism.....promoting an *essential*, positive, and egalitarian human nature that we can rekindle in ourselves and offering a somewhat naive route for return, with any perceived nihilistic realism and repositioning based on the world we now inhabit becoming a target and scapegoat for those wanting to forge on with a one directional path, humanist tendencies, or delusions of hope....and rarely prioritizing the individual. It is only between these diverging ideological positions (Egoist and Primitivist) that I am accused of being "wishy-washy" and sneeringly declared a "fence rider". But, to your average citizen I am nothing short of a crazed madman seeking to destroy the world, to a leftist I am no doubt viewed as one step removed from a tea-partier, to your runin'-the-mill anarchist I am an anti-social hippie devoid of any social grace, to an Egoist I am no doubt an undercover Primitivist sympathizer, to the Primitivist I am certainly under the spell of the navel-gazing Egoists, and to the Nihilists somehow I still cling to the last vestiges of hope? Well, I suppose they're all right from within the confines of their particular ideologies. But from the place from where I stand.....actually, from the unpredictable rapids I ride headed straight for a treacherously uncharted bottomless waterfall, I am floating, I am being, I am drowning, I am battling, I am swimming, I belong.....unapologetically and alive.....not any footnoted research paper or foaming at the mouth diatribe. Smashing against the rocks of ideas, swirling in currents of joy, being pulled under by the unfortunate tides of infected self-doubt, treading in uncharted realms, diving for treasures, and spraying into the mist of oblivion....all at once, knowingly and willingly and yet uncontrollably and uncertain.....living and breathing anarchy.

All of this hints toward the simple and obvious fact that we are not within a vacuum of ourself and our ideas, but instead, we dwell in a living context, are affected by it, and offer our own unique influence to it in ways that go deeper than any singular or collection of analytical explanations or stories can scratch the surface of. Glimmers or slices of this context may be viewed from various angles, criteria, and scopes, each offering their own perspective into

the overall living collage from which we base our reality and our movement through it. At most, we can only temporarily focus certain lenses on specific circumstances or layers for analysis and interplay, for instance, the lenses and criteria through which we view, feel, and experience the so-called communities we inhabit, or the alchemy of the chemical combinations we ingest, or the people we love, or the wars we wage, or the bacterias in our gut, really any situation or context. As animated living matter, some might call this gaze and attempted understanding of these accumulations as peeking into our relationship to ecology and the study of the complex relations between living organisms and the environments we inhabit. Like the water I drink to nourish myself, unfiltered from what is more or less a swamp, alive, dynamic, changing, free, comprising infinite relationships that have become part of me now for over a decade.....as opposed to society's two-part hydrogen and one-part oxygen molecules which get pumped through pipes under town from the toilet to the tap, determined, stagnant, controlled, organized deadness to keep the tools clean, crops watered, and sheep functioning. But as we shake the detritus of domestication and all of its unrelieved misery of the decaying of death.....death not only in material physicality, but in spirit.....as we attempt to deeply breathe with the vitality of life, perhaps the dead ways of thinking, feeling, and being could be finally discarded and we may approach more of an ongoing and complex ecological understanding, one of relationship between unique beings against organized deadness.

Anyway, none of any of this has anything to do with society, which is *really* a matter of organizing deadness. And, I do not propose these thoughts as any sort of incitement for societal change or movement towards something, or even linear analysis or critique, merely as some of my personal observations for others to do as they wish with. The old ways of looking at ourselves and the world have always failed us, directed us, constricted us, they are only products of the domesticating process and can never be a corrective or corrected. The process of domestication warps and twists in so many ways, it strips, reconstitutes, and reconfigures.....it unifies us into the drudgery of a soulless mass of roles, workers, consumers, believers, citizens, activists, spectators, and social media "friends", yet it disconnects us from deeper, more meaningful, more prime and unmediated belongings....where letting go of ourselves, at least temporarily, might be a healthy and needed remedy to the alienated and mediated reality of the modern disconnected and compartmentalized world. Once essential and uncompromising sovereignty is declared, taken to heart, and actualized daily, I'm not really sure if obsessing on ourselves much further really has much to offer, nor does painting a simple picture of a golden era we could be superimposed back into. It is in the places, during the times, and with certain accomplices, that letting go of what we hold so deeply as ourselves and the limits we place on what could be so that we may intermingle with a more diverse and unknown context, that can help clarify who we really are, and who and what surrounds us.

As I write these words, snow falls on the mountain I call home. I feel almost completely removed from the alienating and fracturing technologically socialized nightmare of deadness, and deeply connected to the frozen crystalline flakes that free-fall chaotically, yet determinedly, and pile around the garden and into the forest. I feel no need to define myself against these flakes, nor do I want to be a drift of snow. I am a unique and vital part of this scene, a peculiar thread in an ever-changing tapestry, yet still somehow approaching relative meaningless to it all. For the most part, it is here that I prefer to dwell, not that these dynamics are not a pulsing reality, offering more and less relevance to my being in relation to others and for myself. So, where does this lead? How is it relevant? How can we meaningfully explain this? One might simply say that what we are considering is a plurality of individuals with a gathering of freedoms.....anarchy. I offer no suggestions on how this might look for others, because it will always be dependent on the desires and situations of those involved. Even to express my experience is temporal and shallow, especially with those clumsily brutal hammers called words. But, one way to look at our spirit*, for instance, is our unmediated authentic self (one that's not segmented and compartmentalized into the various roles and expectations of society) in relation with the unmasked understanding and reality of what is outside us.....connection. To move through the baggage of domestication and shed its cages, it seems necessary to look not only inward, to understand who we may actually be, but also, just as relevant, to go outside ourselves. Ecstasy is said to be the experience of being outside one's self, and a life that is both grounded in who we are and at the same time ecstatic seems to me a more authentic and ecological way to be.

But as I grow older, I become less interested in, more impatient with, and hostile towards the shortcomings of the external world that surround and creep in around me from outside our fortified compound and secluded off-the-map watershed. I grow tired of draining, unauthentic, and coerced so-called relationships, and the expectations that come with them. I grow tired of humanity, not necessarily individuals or that outside the constraints of civilization, but the accumulation of deadness, the pile of discarded refuse, the non-ecological. I grow tired of the laziness, repetition, and boredom of that which passes for critique, and the insistence to dwell almost solely within ideas without very much meaningful application to our lived experience. Even in writing these lines, I feel like a hypocrite in adding to the proliferation of anarchist thoughts through words, as opposed to anarchist being. At this point in time, for me, the only meaningfully relevant methods of anarchist discourse are the interpersonal dialogues that challenge, interact, twist and turn, and that fruit real lived activity, or, certain well-articulated communiqués after the fact. But, for this temporary moment, I revert, and fill these empty pages with my current tangents, thoughts, and perspectives, because for the most part, I write this to relations whom I care deeply about and to possible future

accomplices, in hopes of continuing a moving towards an actualized anarchy which works meaningfully against domestication, both in our daily lives, and in a larger continual momentum against civilization.....without the delusions of self-aggrandized hope, without strangulating ideologies, and without the approval of any so-called experts, scenes, movements, or allies. For me, and from what I have come to understand for others as well, enough time, energy, and ink has been spent on declaring and defining the absolute sovereignty and prime regard of the self, of which I would never dream of arguing against.....but to me, what is more interesting, what can be most useful to my lived life, is where and how these autonomous will's collide, overlap, join together, get lost within, run alongside, diverge from, and break apart. These relationships are what make life more than a solitary and alien endeavor, more than an abstract game, more than a vacuous self-referential dead-end.....they make it ecstatic, emotional, delightful, sorrowful, and authentic. Where would an unchartable, unstable, inexplicable concept like love fit in? Or an indescribable connection one might feel to a certain melody in relation to a rhythm? Or any temporary dissociative state of being. I am not speaking of any sort of "oneness" with everything or harmony to join in with, but the infinite assortment of relationships driven from each's free will that penetrate deeply, past the lines we draw, through the masks, in between the cracks, into a place we rarely allow ourselves to go.....unmapped, unsafe, mysterious, sacrilegious, and unpredictable.....and wild.

I would also add, that while I would agree that concepts of absolute truth and essentialist nature are false constraints placed on the self for the external goals of an other (in most cases, the dominant culture's or group's authority over the individual), many Egoists might also argue that there is no personal essence of any kind, that we are nothing but what we chose to do or be at any given time. This dispirited nothingness may appear to offer complete freedom, but in fact, removes any context from which to move through and relate and presents a "radical" detachment and subjectivity that is not all that dissimilar to the alienated context of the world we currently inhabit.... floating meaninglessly through a world of objects and ideas. A life that is free from the constraint and deadening principles of faith, belief, morals, dogmatic presuppositions, or fixed standpoints does not necessitate a dispirited life devoid of deep connections and sense of belonging to something larger than ourselves, on our own terms. In my mind, this is a vital place for critical exploration along with space for letting go of ourselves in certain aspects, not in relation to the apparatus of domestication, but with those individuals and situations we choose. In terms of connection to other unique beings, I do not believe the choice is merely between an ethics that sets as its goal the benefit, pleasure, or greatest good of oneself alone verses some purely altruistic, selfless, duty-filled universal role in a larger plan. At times, in certain situations, on mutual terms, the blurring of lines between ourselves and others can

provide not only for a mutual understanding upon which lived activity can dwell, but also shared joy in deep relation, something gravely missing in most people's lives. The easy part is declaring the autonomy of the individual, the more useful and perhaps more pleasurable and fulfilling project that I would propose is the exploration on a gathering of unique beings, the relationship of freedoms, and their revolt against organized deadness.

This is where my journey currently takes me.

Anyway, enough about this, i gotta go, i wanna play in the snow with the kids.

**As a random side note and inebriated nod to the spirits out there who enter our lives and our livers.....our liver not only supposedly secretes bile as an important function in metabolism and production of red blood cells, essential to our life, but it is also thought by some to be the seat of our emotions and desires, that what makes us unique, some might say our essence. Could feeding our lives, drenching our livers, with these spirits somehow fit into an ecological perspective? That question will be distilled during later hours....perhaps in the spring.*

To Love the Inhuman:

A Critique of John Zerzan's "Animal Dreams"

"Faced with the meaninglessness of the world - the real [...] the individual most often quakes and turns away. The experience of the real is literally unbearable, and philosophy has traditionally come to the rescue to save humanity from meaninglessness, to create the illusion of a truth [...]"

- David F. Bell, introduction to *Joyful Cruelty* by Clément Rosset

Anarcho-Primitivist John Zerzan's thinking exemplifies just such an attempt at rescue, one not only unnecessary, but in fact unwanted, for an anti-civilization critique lived as a joyful life. This essay examines John Zerzan's recent "Animal Dreams", first situating it in a typical anarchist critique motivated through the enshrinement of particular reifications, then exploring how such action leads to Manichaeian thinking, and finally challenging specific claims made within his essay. An alternative mode of relating to the nonhuman closes the piece.

Tenacious Spectres: Morality and Nature

Radicalization, that is, the development of one's critical theory, can be understood largely in terms of dispossession by reification¹; as one's critique grows sharper, one increasingly liberates one's life from these enslaving concepts. All anarchists worth the name have dispelled themselves of State, most have excised Capitalism and God, and many have also banished such subtle ghosts as Family and Production – but some, as a result of their radicalization, not only fail to dispel, but actually enshrine all the more fiercely, Morality and Nature.

Moral socialization is an odd, dissonant thing in the dominant culture. Children are taught at an early age to share, to treat others as they would like to be treated (the Golden Rule), to believe everyone's opinions are of value, and similar maxims according to the altruistic paradigm generally descended from Christian and Enlightenment beliefs, even if those value tables are never explicitly cited during this socialization. Simultaneous to this inculcation is children's experience of realities often at odds with the prescriptions they receive: they see not only the concerted exploitation of the majority by the few, but also commonplace avarice among the many; they see the obvious destitution of some, often disproportionately along visually recognizable demographic lines; and they see women's opinions more or less subtly devalued in quotidian conversation. This dissonance stirs

feelings of moral distress that need some form of catharsis. For some, this release is a naturalization of perceived evils, perhaps via an unknowable divine plan, a misanthropic dismissal of humanity as essentially flawed, or a self-identification with Social Darwinism. Others, though, balk at the horror-show, as their rationalization of the dissonance is that Morality's normative purchase is genuine and reality is simply out of step with it; they demand either a sweeping change or annihilation of the status quo and the earthly manifestation of heaven. Pyotr Kropotkin, an inspirational figure to many radicals, preaches with precisely this kind of moral indignation:

"Our principles of morality say: "Love your neighbour as yourself"; but let a child follow this principle and take off his coat to give it to the shivering pauper, and his mother will tell him that he must never understand moral principles in their direct sense. If he lives according to them, he will go barefoot, without alleviating the misery around him! Morality is good on the lips, not in deeds."^{vi}

Thus, the process of radicalization for many is the moral impugnement of the world. Though I am unaware of any empirical study, it has been my own experience (and, I suspect, that of most readers) that the vast majority of radicals born into the dominant culture were at least initially radicalized in this manner, typically as especially indignant progressive liberals, and the majority of this set still occupy that analytical space, having only clarified their morality. Morality's ontological status is never called into question; indeed, in its besiegement by either the openly immoral or the falsely moral – i.e., *greed is good* or *people need authority* or we would have the war of all against all – amidst an obviously bleak culture, it is all the more vindicated as the Real, the Good, and the True.

In the same vein is the burgeoning anti-civilization anarchist who sees, on the one hand, the culture in which they are forcibly immersed, with its multifarious horrors of dehumanization, objectification, wilted affect, wanton waste, variegated and abundant inter-human oppression, and denuding of the Biosphere; and then sees, seemingly diametrically opposed, the nonhuman world with its vivaciousness, intimacy, immediacy of experience, nutrient and energy cycles in which nothing is wasted or wanted but the energy that the Sun or hydrothermal vents replace, various niches through which all lifeways are valuable, and species interactions in which, even as one kills another, one seemingly never acts against Life itself. It is a small leap, then, to see the Culture as the Evil against Nature, the Good.

Which Side Are You On?

Being a radical thus comes to mean taking a position on the Manichaeian battlefield, fighting for and alongside Nature. Theoretically, it may mean

embodying Nature or restoring an essential substance of wildness within oneself, as the battlefield may be not only material but also spiritual. Actionably, it may realize itself as protecting Nature via stopping particular non-human organisms from being killed, stopping industrial development in particular places perceived as wild or sacred, or attacking persons or infrastructure associated with Civilization; as well as aligning oneself personally with Nature via learning primitive skills, eating a particular diet, or adopting certain spiritual beliefs.

Again, these sentiments are eminently understandable and the actions may or may not be well placed, as what is beautiful in the organic, our habitat as human organisms, is being despoiled horribly by Civilization. The globalized, industrialized, spectacle-commodity culture is destroying all kinds of beings at a rate one thousand times faster than they would normally go extinctⁱⁱⁱ, and huge portions of wildlife have been destroyed just in recent decades as the process accelerates, reaching such a rate as to prompt the creation of a neologism, “defaunation”^{iv}. Meanwhile, the always-present thinness of such efforts as conservation, sustainable agriculture, and green technology becomes an increasingly revolting joke, recently exemplified by the ridiculous efforts this past year of endangered species translocation^v and the attempted displacement of indigenous populations in Alvaro Obregon for the construction of a wind power farm^{vi}.

Considering all of this horror, it is not especially poetically adventurous to describe the culture as a death engine, essentially inimical to the organic. And emotionally intense or poetic writing can be a useful tool and a breath of relief amidst a general bleachedness, so long as it avoids obfuscation by being clear about how, when, and why it is doing so. As a perhaps unfortunate linguistic consequence, calling oneself *anti-civilization* might leave one feeling obligated to be *for* something else that is similarly grand in scope, something bigger than our immediate lives and relations. But while Civilization is a kind of useful shorthand that can be quite clearly defined^{vii}, the abundant references to Nature, animality, and wildness coloring anti-civilization/anti-industrial literature, speech, and thinking are misleading vagaries at best and phantoms at worst.

Civilization, itself a set of overlapping and mutually reinforcing reifications and their corresponding material infrastructure, is characterized and reproduced by exactly this kind of absolutist, dualistic, universalizing thought. Abstract and transcendental values are themselves intrinsically authoritarian and antithetical to embodied and vivacious life, even if they are posited for ostensibly liberatory purposes, as I have written of elsewhere^{viii}. To reiterate briefly, to compartmentalize one’s raw, lived-and-felt, moment-to-moment experience in order to render it, to self-alienate it, into such categories as Nature or wildness is itself an act of separation. Insofar as our loving gaze

assigns to our lover fantasies of perfection, mutilating them into a quasi-divine being into which we can dissolve our inadequacies and disappointments, thus completing ourselves, we have betrayed anything worth the name of love and entered into the realm of religion. Anarcho-Primitivism (AP, whether the nouns or the adjective) is thus, ironically, the stuff of civilized thinking, a pattern of thought that mourns for an imagined reunion with a de-anthropomorphized, but nonetheless extant, divinity.

To elaborate this point, I will unpack “Animal Dreams”, a recent essay by John Zerzan that appeared in the first issue of the biannual green anarchist journal *Black Seed*, as I find the AP analysis to be one of the most interesting ones with which I disagree because of something like convergent evolution: I arrive at superficially similar conclusions to the APs, but with a fundamentally different analysis.

Green Manichaeism: Anarcho-Primitivism As Cosmic Battlefield

Before examining “Animal Dreams” in particular, some context is in order. I am not merely accusing: for Anarcho-Primitivists, the world is *avowedly* a Manichaean battlefield. Zerzan has emphasized more than once on his radio show *Anarchy Radio*, as well as in personal exchanges, that he is dismissive of any anarchist analysis that does not regard a Civilization/Nature dualism as metaphysically fundamental: Civilization with its slavery, death, or undeath versus Nature with its freedom, wildness, and life.

In “Animal Dreams”, Zerzan adds to the *Good* seemingly all non-human animals, who apparently not only occupy the proper side of Mani’s ranks but also serve as models for us to do the same. I will examine how Zerzan assigns to various animals (predominantly charismatic megafauna) humanistic and Christian virtues and how these characterizations are either misleading (because they reflect only one or a few examples among a great many) or simply wrong. Later, I will propose what I find to be a more appropriate relationship to the nonhuman.

Couple Like A Goose; Love Like A Wolf: A Critical Reading of Zerzan’s “Animal Dreams”

In sharp contradistinction to much of Zerzan’s writing that is, even where I disagree, compelling and provocative, “Animal Dreams” reads largely like a set of platitudes, some disturbingly normative for the culture. I want nonetheless to briefly begin where it has merit.

From both the piece itself as well as personal conversations with its author, it is clear that part of Zerzan's goal was to repudiate the dreadfully common and grotesquely speciesist diminution of the inner lives/umwelts/phenomenalities of nonhuman organisms. This goal is certainly worthwhile and admirable, especially in light of Behaviorist/Cartesian residues that linger in both popular and academic cultures^x. Zerzan aptly decries the allergy to so-called anthropomorphism, more accurately described in this particular case as qualitative inference to the presence of consciousness in nonhumans, an act of the very same kind of abduction that nearly every human commits with nearly every other human on an everyday basis^x.

The common critique that humans can report their mental states while nonhumans cannot is laughable and evinces what a lack of understanding there is about communication: the whine of a distressed dog, the enticing change of color of a ripe fruit, the limb-waving and stridulation of a threatening tarantula, and the garish and warning colors of a toxic nudibranch are all communication. Almost any pet owner, forager, or anyone else who has spent a good deal of time with nonhuman animals, including this author, would readily say that nonhuman animals reasonably seem to have an inner life that they are capable of communicating to a greater or lesser extent depending on the particular case. I agree completely with Zerzan that "It is not 'anthropomorphic' to recognize that animals play"^x; and that we also can only loosely speculate what these inner lives are like, as "we do not know how to even comprehend consciousnesses different from our own."

Where Zerzan errs, heavily and repeatedly, is his flagrant and nonsensical moralizing that dominates the piece. He seems to wish to tell us, implicitly, the following: that we should value animals because they exemplify our popularly held morals, as he lists a number of cases of animals seemingly championing them; *but also* that we should view animals as moral exemplars, models of behavior, as "we are lost, but animals point to the right road." Besides the odd circularity inherent in this bifurcated claim that undermines its entire thrust (animals are good because they follow moral X; moral X is good because animals follow it), it is easy to find a number of counter-examples for every moral example Zerzan deploys.

Though he acknowledges, seemingly anticipating a critique like mine, that "All is not sweetness and light in the non-human realm," he softens this admittance by adding "especially in this shaken and disturbed world.", as though the human, somehow *causa sui*, were perhaps *really* to blame. He proceeds to make this caveat close to meaningless by using the bulk of his essay to enumerate cases of non-human organisms exhibiting behaviors in line with liberal humanism or Christian ethics.

Hierarchy and Domination in Non-Humans

As an anarchist, Zerzan of course desires a world without formal hierarchy; he seeks to find animals, needlessly, to validate this desire - as though it were not sufficient for him to simply desire it, but that it instead needed to be written in the cosmos to be legitimate - and thus offers a repudiation of the commonly held idea of animal pecking order. It may indeed be the case that domestication induces hierarchy in some animals in whom it does not exist in the wild, such as has been recently observed with the behavior of wolves versus dogs.^{xii} There are nonetheless numerous cases of dominating behavior in wild organisms.

Many parasitoids^{xiii} seize control of their hosts' bodies, ending their reproductive possibilities through death or debilitation: barnacles of the genus *Sacculina* castrate their crab hosts in order to hijack their bodies, including their sex organs, for reproduction; the Gordian Worm larva inhabits an arthropod host and, maturing, forces the host to drown itself so that the adult worm may erupt from its dead body to reach an aquatic habitat; and wasps of the genus *Ichneumonidae* inject their eggs and symbiotic viruses into other insect larvae, restricting their metamorphosis and creating abnormally large larvae that, like bloated cattle, are gradually devoured alive by the maturing *Ichneumon* larvae^{xiv}. Similar behavior exists in diverse organisms, the behavior having developed numerous times among creatures not closely related to one another: mollusks, nematodes, flatworms, and so on, including non-animals like fungi and viruses.

Besides the parasitic dimension, the social Hymenoptera (colonial bees, wasps, and ants) exhibit caste societies with a rigid division of labor and violent enforcement of hierarchy via physical mutilation, ritualized dominance/submission social interactions, infanticide, and other forms of what entymologists actually dub "policing".^{xv} Again, similar eusocial, hierarchical behavior is exhibited by non-Hymenopteran insects like termites as well as non-insects like certain crustaceans - creatures that are not directly related evolutionarily - suggesting that, like parasitoidalism, domination is a tendency that life produces again and again, an eddy that the organic regularly recapitulates. There is thus nothing to be gained from looking at animals in some generalized way in order to legitimate our desires for anarchy.

Patriarchy, Sexuality, and Gender Relations in Non-Humans

Patriarchy is a repugnant aspect of the dominant culture that seems to lie at the core of Civilization, perhaps being among the first forms of alienation and generative of the compulsory division of labor^{xvi}. Any thoroughgoing anarchist analysis demands a critique of it, but Zerzan seems to think, again,

that we need to look to nonhumans to rationalize this critique - this venture is a useless one, as gendered behavior among animals reveals itself to be a riotous smorgasbord of possibilities.

Among our closest relatives, despite Zerzan's highlighting of lioness hunting and elk matriarchy, the overwhelming majority of mammals are polygynous, often with harem-holding male dominance and sexual dimorphism that leaves the male considerably larger, stronger, and more aggressive. Perhaps the starkest example is that of the elephant seal, in which males violently compete for harems of females numbering up to the hundreds.

In a variety of invertebrates, again having evolved repeatedly in diverse phyla, mating takes place through *traumatic insemination*, in which a spined - literally weaponized - penis pierces the female's body to deliver sperm directly to her viscera. One theory for why this vicious method evolved is to bypass *mating plugs*, an adhesive substance secreted by penises to literally glue a female's reproductive tract closed after mating in order to block the sperm of competing males. I thus shudder at the brazenly general sentiment that "animals [...] are the right road."

Moreover, even engaging in comparative gender relations among the incomprehensible diversity of nonhumans is a close to useless endeavor given the incommensurability of gender across species. In a great many animals, particularly many arthropods but also certain vertebrates like hyenas, females are physically larger and stronger, more socially and sexually dominant, and longer-lived, inverting the physical and social power relations characteristic of patriarchal humanity. And a good deal of genderfucking is present with the abundance of hermaphroditism and sex-changing among nonhuman animals - a huge diversity of animals are capable of changing their sexual organs to make the best of their conditions. One is moved to wonder what could possibly be gained by making human value inferences from beings so different from ourselves, most of whom are indifferent to these human values.

Coupled with Zerzan's appeals to anti-patriarchy is a shockingly Christian sentimentalism for monogamy, as he cites geese and gibbons favorably for their long-term coupling. Why Zerzan is implicitly praising a human institution so closely associated with patriarchy, intimate abuse, and commodity culture is bemusing *prima facie*; but his information is also simply wrong, as this proposition has been debunked along with so many others about nonhuman monogamy: studies since the late 70s have found that, for the goose, "promiscuity is a part of the repertoire of yet another seemingly monogamous bird."^{xvii} An estimated 95-97% of mammals are similarly non-monogamous.^{xviii} In contrast, ruffs, wetland birds in the sandpiper family, mate in a manner resemblant of a queer bacchanal that, I must say, were I ever to eschew my aversion to being prescriptive and morally reifying nonhumans,

would be what I wish more of us would consider to be “the right road”: among these highly promiscuous birds, there are three different male phenotypes, including a female-resembling male that the very masculine, domineering male phenotype will mate with, both topping and bottoming, seemingly because the homoeroticism attracts the attention of observing females and entices them to join the orgy.^{xix}

Zerzan similarly cites examples of animal familiarity, devotion, and parental care - and, certainly, these exist, but only as some among a great many others. With parenting and devotion, there is the octopus mother who starves herself, often fatally, vigilantly defending her young; all around her are the numerous and variegated marine organisms - cnidarians, mollusks, fish, crustaceans, etc. - engaging in the zero-parenting that is broadcast fertilization, in which eggs and sperm are both expelled into the water, the resultant zygotes carried away for a planktonic larval existence in which many are sure to perish. As far as familiarity, we see on the one hand the whipsnake mother who watches over her eggs and then carries her young on her back while, strikingly among arthropods, she seems to affectionately caress them. On the other hand, we see the cannibalism among young sharks and strepsiptera (parasitic insects who superficially resemble flies), who devour their siblings before even leaving the egg or their mother's body, respectively; the incest among certain insects^{xx}; and the parasitic parenting of cuckoos and certain insects, whose parents leave their offspring to be cared for by other species, as these host species mistake them for their own young through cloaking mechanisms.

There is thus among the animals no model for egalitarian gender relations and the ideal family. There is only an incredible variety of genders, gendered behavior, and familial relations that highlight how arbitrary human norms are at any particular time or place. If the world offers us no model, why can we not choose our own without recourse to it?

Mercy and Indifference

Continuing with Christian sentimentalism, Zerzan attempts to declaw the wolf, and perhaps predators in general, by saying it may be the case that “wolves only kill animals that are near their end anyway—the old, sick, injured”. Though hedged as a supposition, it is difficult not to see Zerzan attempting to soften predation into a world of mercy and remorse. And, again, he cherry-picks his evidence to find the conclusions he wants, ignoring readily available counter-examples. A 2009 observation of *Canis Lupus*^{xxi} in a region in which they had a variety of potential prey found, based on sampling the wolves' scat, that 96.4% of the scat held remains of either roe deer or wild boar, thus indicating the wolves' primary prey. Of the prey, 74.1% of the roe deer and 84.2 % of the wild boar were juveniles, less than a year old. Over

time, the wolves took turns targeting the roe deer and the wild boar, each during its birthing period, for the reasons one might expect: “The positive selection of young roe deer and wild boar may be considered opportunist behavior, because the individuals of this age class are easier to capture than adults due to their inexperience.” Indeed, “Roe deer fawns are left alone by their mothers for long periods of time, making them even more vulnerable to wolf predation [...]” Mercy, it ain’t - babynapping, rather. The authors had occasion to cite six previous studies, ranging from 1970 to 2004, that supported the conclusion that wolves target vulnerable juveniles preferentially. One might reasonably infer, as others have, that they might target the elderly and ill for the same reasons - simple ease and opportunism. Far from experiencing mercy or remorse, the manner in which wolf pups play at hunting to gradually increase their skills suggests to me that the wolf feels hunger, desire, joy, and exhilaration as it hunts and kills.

Of course, Zerzan is likely motivated by a desire to redeem the wolf from its popular demonization as infinitely murderous, killing without even the need to eat. To make such a case, I much prefer Farley Mowat, who, besides indicting human civilization as being the real mindless killer, writes at the conclusion of his loosely autobiographical novel *Never Cry Wolf*, “Somewhere to the eastward a wolf howled [...] for me, it was a voice which spoke of the lost world that was once ours, before we chose the alien role, a world which I had glimpsed and almost entered [...]” Mowat here redeems the besmirched wolf not by apologizing for its killing, but rather by pointing at what seems a beautiful intimacy between the wolf and its world. Similarly, in a theme exhibited throughout his work, Nietzsche saw in animality (including uncivilized humans) a kind of profound, child-like innocence; not a moral innocence of being gentle, humble, and meek, all of which he clearly despised, but an innocence of unmediated life in which one is in tune with their senses, makes no apologies for their instincts, and is unafraid to grasp immediate joy.

Gaianism and Misanthropy as Closeted Humanism and Anthropocentrism

At times, Zerzan exhibits nothing so much as his apparent biological ignorance. He writes, oddly misanthropically for someone who repudiates misanthropy, “We are the top of the food chain, which makes us the only animal nobody needs.” Besides the term *food chain* (Zerzan will later, inexplicably, use this same term in sneer quotes, as though he finds it unbelievable) being a bit of a misnomer – it is only one aspect of a food web, used to organize organisms into trophic levels, that is sometimes misleadingly employed to rank organisms in an Aristotelian Great Chain of Being-esque manner – one is moved by Zerzan’s statement to ask whether he has ever heard of dust and face mites, roundworms, flukes, or tapeworms, to name only

a few and those very broadly, or, if we extend beyond animals, any number of decomposers, human gut flora, mitochondria, and so on *ad nauseam*. Zerzan is most definitely aware of the evidence that North American Indians interacted with their forest ecosystems so as to create pockets of sub-climax forest succession zones that increased biodiversity in the forest as a whole^{xxi}, so why is he playing these self-shaming rhetorical games?

What is such a misanthropy except another form of human exceptionalism, another way of making the human the one and only Other who stands apart from everything else? As the Invisible Committee notes, referencing the anthropocentrism motivating the widespread move toward naming our era the Anthropocene, “For the last time, [Man] assigns himself the main role, even if it’s to accuse himself of having trashed everything—the seas and the skies, the ground and what’s underground—even if it’s to confess his guilt for the unprecedented extinction of plant and animal species.”^{xxiii}

Underlying all of the problems outlined so far, moreover, is the deeper question of anthropomorphism that Zerzan uses to frame the entire piece. Zerzan quotes Henry Beston’s apt statement, “For the animal shall not be measured by man.”, but he seems not to take it to heart. Yes, of course it is a mistake to have such an intense allergy to anthropomorphism that one is averse to the abduction that nonhuman animals are conscious - such an attitude suggests massive alienation. But Zerzan has tumbled over the edge into an anthropocentrism that projects his own morality onto the nonhuman world. As I write elsewhere of his friend and frequent collaborator Kevin Tucker, Zerzan has committed the same error as the ancient Stoics: he rejects anthropocentrism, but, in doing so, he is in fact anthropocentric in a roundabout way.

Zerzan indicts others for projecting pecking order, Freudianism, and hierarchy onto the nonhuman world, but he does the very same with his own values; once he has painted the nonhuman biosphere a color of his liking, obscuring and pretending not to notice its incredible variation, he swears his allegiance to it. He asks, posing as the ingénue after his obfuscation, “Might it not be that nature is for the happiness of all species, not just one?” I reply by asking what is this “nature” that is somehow different than the gestalt “of all species” and the world’s abiotic elements they inhabit and cocreate; and what would it mean for this totality to be “for” anything, as though the gestalt of innumerable valuing beings could somehow emergently value something in and of itself or, even if it did, that we could somehow comprehend this evaluation?

Like Tucker, Zerzan has regularly distanced himself from the Left and has written apt criticisms of it^{xxiv}, yet he is still operating on the same Manichaeian logic that has characterized most forms of anarchism and leftism since their

earliest days. Bakunin saw human beings, originating in the objective good of Nature, as essentially moral until they were corrupted by the unnaturalness of the State; Zerzan extends this line of thinking by exalting the as-yet-uncorrupted nonhuman animals as moral exemplars.

To Love the Inhuman

Since I was a very young child, for as long as I can remember, I have been fascinated by nonhuman organisms. The stranger, the more inhuman a creature was, the more I loved it - it fascinated me to know, for example, that a creature like a schistosome (a blood fluke that parasitizes first snails, then mammals during its lifecycle, eventually inhabiting a blood capillary) has a life incomprehensibly different from my own: sensing mostly through smell, metamorphosing multiple times, living as though “a vein is a river”^{xxxv}, and mating perpetually as an adult. I am surrounded by aliens who are yet my kin, each enclosed in its own *umwelt*, such that the world is a high-infinite array of mutually mysterious yet mutually informing perceptual universes that are constantly spilling into one another. To call that vast and mysterious gestalt either good or bad, something to be either followed or rejected, is the greatest philosophical impropriety, as it entails tremendously overstepping what can be known or evaluated.

The only reaction that seems appropriate is something like Nietzsche’s *Dionysian Pessimism*, “a general approbation of the real in all its chaotic and cruel presence”^{xxxvi}, because it is strange and lovely, awesome and ecstatic to be alive - one is moved to joy *despite* the purposelessness and lack of objective value one readily perceives. I relish that my body eats and shits, fucks and rots, pointlessly - that it dissolves other creatures into it, annihilating their consciousnesses even as a myriad of new bodies and minds erupt from my effluence and will erupt from my dead flesh. I recall once when I, having just fucked in the Hambacher Forest, watched as several flies descended to start feeding on my ejaculate within maybe ten seconds - *that* is Dionysian Pessimism. In short, to love the inhuman, do not preach to it or of it - simply accept it as such, and revel in that acceptance.

Notes

i Reification is a term that has been used in closely related, but nonetheless significantly different ways in the history of critical theory. A particularly well-developed definition is articulated by Jason McQuinn in his “Critical Self-Theory” essay in the third issue of *Modern Slavery*, too lengthy to cite in its entirety here. Going beyond the typical understanding of reification as the phenomenon in which an abstract idea is concretized, McQuinn notes that reification “includes two correlative moments [...] On the one side an activity is *reduced* to a passive object, and on the other side the activity that is removed from the then passively-constructed object is projected onto a *symbolic agent*.”

- ii Kropotkin, Pyotr. "Anarchist Communism: Its Basis and Principles".
- iii De Vos, Jurriaan M., et al. "Estimating the normal background rate of species extinction, *Conservation Biology*, vol 29, issue 2, pp 452-462, April 2015.
- iv Dirzo, Rodolfo, et al., "Defaunation in the Anthropocene", *Science*, Vol. 345, no. 6195, pp 401-406, July 2014.
- v "Episode 61: Hail Satan; It's a Beautiful World" and "Episode 66: Make Total Destroy, and Bring Us the Champagne", *Free Radical Radio*, 11/07/2014 and 12/10/2014
- vi "Alexander Dunlap on Alvaro Obregon", *Free Radical Radio*, 06/07/2015
- vii Many discussions of civilization are hampered by a lack of a clear definition of the subject. Briefly, by civilization, I mean a way of human life characterized by the growth of cities, areas of urban population sufficiently dense as to require the routine importation of food from corresponding rural surroundings characterized by agriculture. Civilized life generally includes all of the following, to varying degrees: collective activity tightly organized around a linear and numerical conception of time; a high level of ritual and symbolic culture; complex and explicit social hierarchy; political representation; the formation of a State, which attempts to monopolize the use of physical violence and delegitimize non-State violence; bureaucracy; compulsory labor (work); and societal mores and ideology rationalizing racial or cultural supremacy, dominance of Nature, and social progress. Civilized persons are characterized by highly reified thought, as Civilization itself is largely a set of reifications intersubjectively constructed by persons acting in social roles that create and maintain corresponding infrastructure. To be anti-civilization, then, is to be anti-reification; it thus is at least *prima facie* suspect to be in some way *for* a different set of reifications.
- viii "Corrosive Consciousness, Part I: How One Might Profane Green Platonism", *Black Seed*, vol. 4, Spring 2015.
- ix The mere need for an international assembly of scientists in 2012 to sign a document declaring that at least some nonhuman animals are in fact conscious ("The Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness") is a testament to this incredible alienation.
- x The ancient Problem of Other Minds – the fact that we ultimately have no way of knowing, of directly experiencing, the consciousness of other beings – is ultimately indissoluble. A difference of species does not change the problem fundamentally. Because we routinely assume other humans are subjects of a life, it is just as reasonable to do the same with at least some nonhumans.
- xi All unreferenced quotes following this one are from Zerzan's "Animal Dreams" piece.
- xii Morell, Virginia. "Wolves cooperate but dogs submit, study suggests", *Science*. American Association for the Advancement of Science, 08/19/2014.
- xiii Parasitoids are organisms who, like parasites, spend a significant portion of their life upon or within a host organism that they use for some combination of food, shelter, and transportation. Unlike parasites, parasitoids necessarily kill, devour, or sterilize their hosts to complete their lifecycle. They are my favorite counterexample to the moralization of nonhumans, due to the fact that their behavior is often quite horrific from a Christian/humanist perspective - so much so, in fact, that no less a figure than Charles Darwin was moved to write of them to one of his colleagues: "I own that I cannot see as plainly as others do, and as I should wish to do, evidence of design and beneficence on all sides of us. There seems to me too much misery in the world. I cannot persuade myself that a beneficent and omnipotent God would have designedly created the Ichneumonidae with the express intention of their feeding within the living bodies of Caterpillars [...]" Here we see Darwin resisting a metaphysical flight from the real that David Bell describes in the epigraph.
- xiv Interestingly, Zerzan brings up the ichneumon, referring to it imprecisely as a fly (ichneumon are Hymenopterans, closely related to other wasps, bees, sawflies, and ants; they are not Dipterans, the true flies), in order to showcase its marvelous senses; he avoids bringing up its reproductive cycle that might turn moralistic stomachs.

xv Powell, Scott and Tschinkel, Walter R. "Ritualized conflict in *Odontomachus brunneus* and the generation of interaction-based task allocation: a new organizational mechanism in ants", *Animal Behavior*, vol. 58, issue 5, November 1999, pp. 965-972.

Franks, Nigel R. and Scovell, Edward. "Dominance and reproductive success among slave-making worker ants", *Nature*, vol. 304, August 25, 1983 pp 724-725.

Monnin, Thibaud and Ratnieks, Francis L. "Policing in queenless ponerine ants", *Behavioral Ecology and Sociobiology*, vol. 50, issue 2, July 2001, pp 97-108.

xvi The earliest known monument, Goebekli Tepe, depicts numerous erect penises prominently, seemingly as signs of masculine power. Zerzan himself has suggested that patriarchy may have generated the first division of labor in his "Patriarchy, Civilization, and the Origins of Gender".

xvii Ely, Craig R. "Extra-Pair Copulation in the Greater White-Fronted Goose". *The Condor* vol. 91, 1989, pp 990-991.

xviii "Social Monogamy in Mammalian Species", *Wikipedia*.

xix van Strien, Willy. "The faeder identity – A third male type in ruffs". Bionieuws, June 26, 2010.

xx "Insect Incest Produces Healthy Offspring", *Laboratory Equipment*, December 8, 2011.

Vincent, Alice. "Hermaphrodite insect uses incestuous cloning to eradicate males", *Wired*, July 19, 2011.

xxi Barja, Isabel. "Prey and prey-age preference by the Iberian wolf *Canis lupus signatus* in a multiple-prey ecosystem" *Wildlife Biology*, vol. 15, 2009, pp. 147-154.

xxii Jacke, Dave and Toensmeier, Eric. *Edible Forest Gardens*, Chelsea Green Publishing, White River Junction, Vermont, 2005.

xxiii The Invisible Committee, *To Our Friends*, Semiotext(e), 2015.

xxiv Consider his "The Left? No Thanks!" as well as his excellent examinations of the historical role of unions in *Elements of Refusal*.

xxv The quote is taken from Zimmer, Carl. *Parasite Rex*.

xxvi Bell, David F. Introduction to *Joyful Cruelty* by Clément Rosset, Free Association Press.

Symbiogenetic Desire: An Egoist Conception of Ecology

By Bellamy Fitzpatrick

An Unfortunate Silence

Egoist anarchism has regularly had criticism leveled against it for its relative silence on issues of ecology. This criticism is well-placed: other than a few references to how non-human animals are exemplars of egoism due to their seemingly unalienated relationship with their desires¹, egoist literature is sorely lacking in this regard. This lamentable absence likely has to do with the proclivities of its authorship more than anything else, as an egoist analysis is readily applicable to ecology.¹

The *identity eliminativism* – the denial of oneself as having an essential self, a perspective that will be defined and developed further in this piece – implied by egoism is the basis of this ecological worldview, as one's sense of self expands to subsume and be subsumed by one's habitat and symbiotes. Through such an analysis, one steers clear of the twin alienations of, on the one hand, the tiny self, that is, the self as an independent, enclosed, free-willed subject who remains relatively stable through space and time and who interacts with a world of objects; and, on the other hand, the reification of the nonhuman world, that is, the construal of nonhuman organisms as a more or less unified whole that acts collectively for the Good and into which one can dissolve oneself or to which one can swear allegiance. Eschewing both of these alienations, one finds oneself able to experience a symbiogenetic desire that unites a love of oneself with a love of one's ecosystem.

The Expansive Self: Identity Eliminativism

An egoist conception of ecology begins with the notion of the expansive self. The *expansive self* regards the inner world, our thoughts and emotions, and the outer world, our phenomenality or sensory experience, as inseparable, as each reciprocally informs and defines the other. Insofar as identity can be said to exist, it is our perceptual totality, shifting from moment to moment. When we walk through the world, all that we touch and perceive is an extension of ourselves; conversely, there is no *I* that exists separately from our phenomenal experience. Thus, *the self subsumes and is subsumed by the world*, annihilating this subject/object dichotomy that alienates us from other beings and places.

If our language sounds strange here, it is because we are trying to talk about the ineffable. Perception is the basis of existence, but it is also profoundly difficult to describe with words: the qualitative always eludes the symbolic; however circumspect and technical or poetic and pithy the phrase, it can never completely capture the real of our experience. The phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty, while not an anarchist egoist (actually, for at least part of his life, a Marxist! *gasp*), nonetheless beautifully described how perception is neither subjective nor objective but a gestalt from which the two are artificially rendered:

*"The visible about us seems to rest in itself. It is as though our vision were formed in the heart of the visible, or as though there were between it and us an intimacy as close as between the sea and the strand [...] What there is then are not things first identical with themselves, which would then offer themselves to the seer, nor is there a seer who is first empty and who, afterward, would open himself to them – but something to which we could not be closer than by palpating it with our look, things we could not dream of seeing 'all naked' because the gaze itself envelops them, clothes them with its own flesh."*⁴¹

What is traditionally called the object of perception, then, is as much a part of ourselves as what is traditionally called the subject of perception – we are so accustomed to think only of the latter as being truly ourselves. With the dissolution of transitivity of identity, the importance of perception to identity becomes clearer still. David Hume is instructive on the point of identity eliminativism, when he observes that there is no essential substrate, no fixed and quintessential *I*, that exists *behind* his phenomenality or the thoughts and feelings he has about it; instead, his sensory experience and his reflections of that experience are the whole of his being. We are not merely a body, which is only part of our perception, but instead everything we perceive, everything with which we interact. And among that with which we interact are of course other beings, meaning that our consciousnesses are inextricably intertwined.

We are therefore experiencing at all times the ultimately ineffable phenomenon of nigh-infinitely many mutually co-created consciousnesses. When we encounter one another, human or nonhuman, being or place, each becomes forever a part of the other - whatever beauty, strangeness, or upset that encounter might bring, we know, as those feelings pass from immediate intensity yet leave us permanently changed, that we have only encountered a new and stimulating aspect of ourselves with which we were previously unfamiliar.

The Tiny Selves: The Reification of Identity

To highlight my meaning with a foil, opposite to the expansive self are various conceptions of what Jason McQuinn has taken to calling “the tiny self”ⁱⁱⁱ – the self as mere body, the self as the free-willed bourgeois economic agent, the self as social role or identity, and so forth. Each of these is a reified self, an idea of who and what we are that comes from giving undue weight to one aspect of ourselves, to hypostatizing one part of our experience and imagining that it is all that we are.

The expansive self is diametrically opposed to these conceptions of self that characterize the dominant culture: the Cartesian self that sees its distinctiveness as self-evident or the bourgeois self that imagines a separable entity that is self-willed and therefore morally entitled to and responsible for its economic success.

To take just one case here, as I have discussed this issue at greater length elsewhere^{iv}, Descartes’ *cogito ergo sum* (“I think; therefore, I am”) contains, like every ideology of domination, a subtle presupposition: “I”. Stirner rejects out of hand the Cartesian split by describing himself as “creator and creature [Schöpfer und Geschöpf] in one.”^v – he does not presuppose himself as a separate entity of his phenomenal perception but instead recognizes that subjectivity and objectivity are simply synthetic conceptual frameworks, sometimes useful instrumental constructions that have no existence beyond our moment-to-moment imagination of them. Nietzsche similarly repudiated this atomized self as a linguistic fiction, a mode of thinking imposed on us by the subject-verb-object structure of our language.^{vi}

Nature: The Platonic Residue

Yet the expansive self is also the very antithesis of any conception of Mother Nature, the Gaia perspective^{vii}, or other reifications of the nonhuman – it is not advancing the notion that there is some transcendental whole we could call Life that we might dissolve ourselves into or act on the behalf of for the Greater Good. While there is certainly a great deal to draw from the observation that organisms often are deeply enmeshed symbiotically, that the niches in ecosystems are often mutually reinforcing; these phenomena are counterposed by the fact that, at times, organisms also demonstrably act inimically to the stability of the biosphere: take cyanobacteria, photosynthetic microorganisms whose evolution might have annihilated most life on Earth 2.3 billion years ago by filling the atmosphere with oxygen that was toxic to the anaerobic majority of life. Considering contradictions like this one, what can it mean to act in accordance with the biosphere?

Even were this not the case, the identification of a Gaia or Life would be yet another case of self-alienation – we do not experience a biotic/abiotic totality except in cases of adventurous imagining; and, to whatever extent there is one, we are surely as much a part of it as anything else, meaning our desires are its desires. It thus cannot grant to us any metric of value. Unfortunately, a pernicious desire to recapitulate this reification of the nonhuman, for “life [to be] about something bigger than ourselves”,^{viii} persists in anti-civilization theory today.

The Platonic urge is strong: insofar as we put our weight in recent archaeological findings^{ix}, the very beginnings of Civilization may be characterized by believing in things “bigger than ourselves”, things greater than actual and particular beings or events, things vast and eternal. Whether it can be said to be an essential human characteristic is unclear, but it is certainly an urge of present human beings to reify aspects of their lives, perhaps due to a relationship with enslavement^x or depression^{xi}. Though some seem to think an ecological perspective entails reifying something great and beautiful and leaping into it with outstretched arms; an alternative lies in persistently refusing reification, rather than simply choosing which is ostensibly the right one.

Symbiogenetic Desire

Biologists, most famously Lynn Margulis^{xii}, employ the beautiful term *symbiogenesis* (etymologically meaning something like *origin of life together*) to describe the phenomenon in which two or more ostensibly distinct organisms become so closely intertwined in their lifeways that they more or less merge into one creature.

By way of example, certain termites are able to digest wood through having their guts inhabited by protist (complex single-celled organisms) symbiotes who, in turn, are inhabited by bacterial symbiotes; up to one-third of a termite’s weight can consist of these creatures, each of which is dependent on the others for survival. Other species of termites have their massive nests inhabited by a fungus that acts as a kind of external stomach for the insects, enabling enhanced digestion. The fungus occupies a larger volume of the nest and possesses a greater metabolism than the termites themselves, and it possibly influences the behavior of the insects through chemical signaling not unlike the kind that happens among differing organs of the same body.

In the same vein, an immensely distant ancestor of our cells may have been formed similarly, through smaller and simpler cells fusing into larger and more complex ones. Margulis’ Symbiogenetic Hypothesis posits that at least some eukaryotic cells – the complex cells that, in this case, make up

plants and animals – came about through larger cells engulfing smaller cells, the latter becoming organelles of the former.

A parallel, then, can be drawn between this biological understanding of inseparability and emergence in the organic and the gestalt sense of identity - or, perhaps better, lack of identity - described above. Recognition that each of us is constituted by every other being we encounter entails a perspective of intimacy, a desire to live as deeply and vivaciously as possible. An ecological perspective, then, reveals itself as one that treats all organisms, humans and nonhuman, as potential symbiotes, cocreators with whom we can have various relationships.

Just as one might have a close and intimate, a friendly, a cordial, a neutral, an antagonistic, or a hostile relationship with a human, one might have any of those relationships with a non-human. One might therefore strive toward unions of egoists among the organisms in one's habitat, maximizing mutualistic interactions and minimizing antagonistic ones through Stirner's understanding of infinitely revisable collaborations among beings who combine their powers toward the pursuit of cooperatively achieved, but individually recognized, values. Even non-animals, surely, experience something, possess a phenomenality, and have some notion of value, one we can often infer through interspecies communication; though surely their experience of value is unspeakable and ultimately incomprehensible to us. Through such unions, we become symbiotes of one another; our sense of self expands to encompass the bodies, lives, and values of others through symbiogenetic desire.

Practically, an interspecies union of egoists would surely entail the abandonment of agriculture, a thoroughly stultifying practice that homogenizes experience and squelches the diversity of mutually co-created consciousnesses. Subsistence through some combination, varying with bioregion, of foraging and horticulture/permaculture would mean not only a richer and more diverse habitat; but also would entail an intimate relationship with it through regular interaction. In this way, we truly inhabit our ecosystem, enriching ourselves as well as our symbiotes from whom we are inseparable. Similarly, the abolition and destruction of the homogenizing and toxifying institutions and infrastructure characterizing civilization follow from such a perspective, as they could only limit and stultify ourselves and our connections.

Anti-Civilization Egoism

The gaze of the rapacious capitalist objectifies the biosphere, treating it as an object to be plundered by whoever has the tenacity and guile to best

exploit it. The paleoconservative or libertarian gaze romanticizes it, regarding it as the wide-open terrain of rugged individualism on which one might live off the fat of the land. The liberal or conservationist gaze spectacularizes it, transforms it into a thing that should be cherished and preserved for its beauty. Again, all of these perspectives are iterations of alienation predicated on reifying the subject/object dichotomy; they merely dress it in different skins. As M. Kat Anderson writes, “These seemingly contradictory attitudes—to idealize nature or commodify it—are really two sides of the same coin, what the restoration ecologist William Jordan terms the ‘coin of alienation’ [...] Both positions treat nature as an abstraction—separate from humans and not understood, not real.”^{xiii}

But the egoist perspective dissolves this alienation. It refuses the notion that our selves are limited to this little bag of skin; it insists that we extend our bodies to encompass our perceptual horizons. I am every person I have met, however fleetingly; every river I have swum in lovingly or passed by, barely noticing; every mountain I have climbed or merely glanced upon while driving; every intoxicant I have consumed; every advertisement to which I have been subjected. The habitat in which we choose to live thus becomes not merely a logistical-economical choice, but instead one of whom we fundamentally want to be.

The anti-civilization insurgency thus takes on an irredeemably personal character. We do not resist civilization because it is “innately wrong”^{xiv} or because it is “the domination of nature”^{xv}, we resist it because it is an absolute assault on ourselves. There is no need to mediate such a desire through an unfounded claim about transcendental goods and evils or a conceptualization of the nonhuman; it is one immediately felt.

The flattening of living ground into dead, uniform parking plots is the flattening of our affect. The mediation of our lives through representations is a stifling of creativity and dreams. The denuding and toxification of the biosphere is the restriction of our lives and the narrowing of possibilities. Our sorrow and rage is not directed at some essential metaphysical Other that attacks Nature; it is directed at an immediate mutilation of our experience, of ourselves.

notes

i Stirner writes, for instance, when imagining a conversation with people who feel they need absolute values to guide them lest they merely follow their instincts and passions and thus “do the most senseless thing possible. – Thus each deems himself the – devil; for, if, so far as he is unconcerned about religion, he only deemed himself a beast, he would easily find that the beast, which does follow only its impulse (as it were, its advice), does not advise and impel itself to do the ‘most senseless’ things, but takes very correct steps.” Stirner, Max. *The Ego and His Own*, trans. Steven T. Byington, ed. Benjamin R. Tucker, pref. James L. Walker. New York: Benjamin R. Tucker 1907.

- ii Merlau-Ponty, Maurice. "The Visible and the Invisible: The Intertwining—The Chiasm".
- iii "Interview with Jason McQuinn on Critical Self-Theory", *Free Radical Radio*, 02/27/2015.
- iv See my "In Defense of the Creative Nothing" at bellamy.anarchyplanet.org
- v *The Ego and His Own*
- vi Nietzsche, Friedrich. "On the Prejudices of Philosophers", *Beyond Good and Evil*.
- vii Note that by Gaia Perspective, I do not mean to refer to the Gaia Hypothesis advanced by James Lovelock
- viii Hayes, Cliff. "Slaves to Our Own Creations", *Black And Green Review*, vol. 1.
- ix Consider the recent claims by archaeologist Klaus Schmidt – leader of the excavation of Goebekli Tepe, the earliest known human monument – that a human turn toward religion was the beginning of Civilization as its construction precipitated, perhaps necessitated, the domestication of plants and animals in order to furnish the sedentary lifestyle dictated by the construction, maintenance, and worship of the monuments. The monuments themselves display symbols that might be interpreted as the human domination of the nonhuman (humans holding, perhaps controlling, various animals that might be considered dangerous) and the triumph of patriarchy (phallocentrism).
- x Rosset, Clément. "The Cruelty Principle". *Joyful Cruelty*.
- xi Real, Terrence. *I Don't Want to Talk About It: Overcoming the Secret Legacy of Male Depression*.
- xii A number of biologists dating back to the early 1900s have discussed variants of this theory. Margulis put forth the modern version, still controversial but widely accepted, arguing that animal and plant cells first formed through the unification of simpler cells. She has since argued, more controversially, that symbiogenesis ought to be considered a major factor of evolution, influential on a par with selection by competition.
- xiii Anderson, M. Kat. *Tending the Wild: Native American Knowledge and the Management of California's Natural Resources*.
- xiv Tucker, Kevin, *Black And Green Forum*.
- xv Zerzan, John, "Patriarchy, Civilization, And The Origins Of Gender".

My Worlds and I

by Apio Ludd

Lying in the warmth of the sun simply being myself as an aware body is an amazing high. I lie down on the platform by the creek and start breathing very deeply. I become more and more aware of myself as a living body in its world, less and less as an abstract concept. I cover my eyes with my hands. In the blackness I see a brilliant many-rayed blue-indigo star. As it slowly dims, it changes shape over and over in various shades of dark blue and indigo. I take pleasure in these shapes which occasionally take forms I can give names to: skulls, animal faces, flowers, and the like. Then I decide to remove my hands from my closed eyes. Now I find myself in the midst of the most brilliant fiery deep orange. I feel like I am in the midst of a fire that will not burn me, like I am that fire. As the color slowly lightens and cools, I feel an ecstatic joy like the peak moments of a psychedelic experience. I have become one with the warmth and light of my sun.

*

“The earth” assumed to be a unity, a static whole, “the environment” assumed to be one, static, and somehow separate from you and me, these are nothing more than conceptions, because only conceptions can be static. Actual things and beings, in a constant flow of interacting, relating, acting, etc., cannot remain static. This is why language can only offer tools for naming things and events, never precise and accurate descriptions. I find names and conceptions useful. They provide me with maps for maneuvering through my worlds. But if I mistake a conception for an actual entity, I grant it a certain power – I pour some of my power into it, and in this way give it power over me. This is when a conception becomes a phantasm haunting me, coming between me and my worlds. So I keep myself aware that the way I talk about something, the way I use some conception, can either play into the process of creating phantasms or expose and undermine it. Because I want to willfully maintain myself as the center of my life and world, I aim to do the latter.

*

*As I sit among the boulders
on the beach,
I can see the fluidity
of everything.
Boulders wear a mask of permanence.
Solid, hard, they look as if
they've been there forever.
But on this beach*

*the rocks blend
grainy greys
with nacreous whites
in sinuous swirls and waves
a sculpture showing
how they whirled and flowed
into each other,
in a slow, slow dance.
And I feel
that they are still dancing,
still flowing,
still whirling together
slowly,
so slowly
that only in stillness
can I feel it.*

*

Those who find it advantageous for maintaining a specialized role, a moral high ground, a position of power (even if only in circumscribed circles), etc., often use ecological ideologies to promote static conceptions of nature, environment, life, earth, ecosystem, etc., that are much the same as the conceptions imposed through the homogenizing practices of the state, the technological order, capitalism, in short, of civilization. They use these static conceptions to naturalize the idea that “community” – defined by specific “natural” borders – takes precedence over individuals, over you and me, and that this imagined static entity must protect itself from intruders. This way of conceiving natural relations has historically served those promoting provincialist and nationalist movements and takes a leftward turn under the names of “anti-colonialism” and “anti-imperialism.” In this way of thinking, individuals only exist as parts in a system, gears in a biological machine. Ecologists like to call this wholism, but such a perspective in politics is called totalitarianism. For a machine to function, gears must be kept in their proper place. Fluctuation can make the whole thing break down. And this ideological mentality currently dominates environmentalist thinking and practice. It is a rigid lifeless view of life that leaves no room for fluctuation, transformation or even adaptation. It rests on the same sort of assumptions as the most reactionary political perspectives.

*

*My world at night
is a multiple world...
In a brilliant fire
a copper bell rings darkly
sounding the alarm of a passing storm
Horses prance nervously
A tower collapses
and a dancing girl giggles
at the falling of a star
I wander through such nights
where the moonlight reflects
from the façades of pallid ruins,
with monstrous weeds through which
golden-scaled lizards crawl
I, the lone mammal, feel my burning blood
calling me to leap and dance
a howling bacchante
hot wine in my veins
I await the pale moon's flirtations
and the icy caress of the night.
I await the dark wonders
of wild Luna's shadow dance.*

*

Both ecologists and nature mystics like to impose collectivist or totalizing (“wholistic”) conceptions on their actual experience of sensing, interacting, relating, coming together with, moving apart apart from other beings – the constant motion, change, transformation; the constant inconstancy, the permanent impermanence, the perpetual dissolution of anything that might crystallize into a “community”, a “society” – *this* is the phenomenal experience, the actuality. Trying to flatten this experience into “communities” is an attempt to tame it, to domesticate it, to order it, to take it out of the realm of experience, of *sensual* phenomena – and into the realm of ideas, of thoughts, of beliefs – of civilization, of philosophy, of religion.

And so the nature mystic (and the ecologist) might say with a straight face: “... the source of stress lies in the relationships *between* the human community and the natural landscape” (David Abrams, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, page 21). This assumes the existence of a unit called “human community” and a unit called “natural landscape” that are separate and relate to each other as two separate beings. I do not experience either of these – “natural landscape” or “human community” – anywhere. Instead I experience myself in the midst of myriads of unique, constantly changing individual be(com)ings and events,

phenomena interweaving their experiences, motions, activities in constant flux. It is true that I use my capacity for making distinctions, for interpreting this flux, so that I can maneuver in it, play with it, meet my needs and create my desires through it, but it remains a flux, a movement of myriads of be(com)ings. And when I have the opportunity to relax into thoughtlessness, into “self-forgetfulness”, I become the center of this flux and take it all into myself. How then could I ever want to harm this flux? It would be harming my own ever-changing self-creation.

*

*Winds howl...
Raving dances through trees...
Crashing, banging, wild braying,
howlings deep into the night.
Fearful, yet rejoicing,
like a crazed and frantic monkey
dancing through the treetops
in a thunderstorm.
Too many lies
so softly spoken,
words twisted on the academic tongue
to tame the storms,
harness the lightning,
turn madness into measure,
timely tyranny of reason
and of atheistic gods.
But winds batter down the fences,
lightning sets fire to the bridles,
thunder smothers all the verbiage
that would tame poetic storms.
And the poets become monsters
writing with blood,
dancing on the skulls
of all believers.
For the pious always bore us –
let their god be called Jehovah,
Christ, Allah or Reason,
Jupiter, Vishnu or Science.
The chaos of my will,
my dreams,
my laughter
will never be so weak
it bends its knee*

*or bows its head.
Instead I'll be a monster
and a storm,
the raging howl of poetry
that gives wing to desire,
the creative violence
by which I make my worlds.*

*

How do I express an egoist and anarchist conception of the relation of human individuals to the rest of their environment (i.e., to the other living beings, the soil, air, water, etc. that they encounter and with which they create their lives)? Of course, I start from myself. I realize that the world I encounter is *my* world, the environment in which I move is *my* environment, so I interact with it in terms of my needs and desires. I experience my world, my environment interweaving with the worlds and environments of many, many other individuals, some of whom appear to me as living be(com)ings as well. So I make the effort to understand and play with the interweaving of the needs and desires of the various individuals I encounter. As much as I can, I like to play this game in a way that enhances the life of each individual involved, but I've experienced the conflict of needs and desires between and within individuals and am willing to accept the consequences of this conflict. I recognize it as an aspect of the fluidity of life. So, like every other individual, I weave myself into and out of relationships, interactions, conflicts, etc., based on my needs, my desires, and my capacity for realizing them.

Considering that all individuals operate in this way (whether willfully or not), everyone shapes their environment. What you and I call an environment is not a thing, a steady state; it is nothing more than the constant fluctuation of activities, interactions, relationships, conflicts, unions, transformations, etc. between individuals. Or rather, "environment" is an abstraction that, at its best, you and I can use to point to such a fluctuation, particularly when the activities in flux have become sufficiently habitual and mutually adaptive to appear relatively stable. Unfortunately, people use this abstraction far too often as a conception of a whole of which the various individuals are mere parts, thus giving the environment precedence over the individuals who are said to make it up. Since even the most radical environmentalists see human beings as having a capacity to act willfully, to make decisions, they grant the environment, conceived in this totalitarian way, moral authority over human beings. Another puritan god destroying the poetry of life. Another despotic god that free, poetic spirits will destroy...

Sometimes, if I am out on a cloudless night when the moon is full, I will reach up and grasp the moon between a finger and my thumb. I close my eyes and pop the moon into my mouth. It leaves a taste on my tongue that is icy and sweet like wintergreen or mint. That taste is the taste of a star-filled, winter, mountain-top sky glowing icily in an infinite brilliant dance of the darkest night with the exquisite light of countless stars. I open my eyes with joy at seeing the moon still dancing before me. It is wonderful to be able to take something so completely into yourself without losing it, to experience it so completely.

*

Ecology originated as a branch of biology, in other words, as a *science*. So the ecologist is supposed to view the world that surrounds her in terms of *facts* and *abstractions* (so-called natural laws). If the term has now also become another name for the environmentalist movement, this movement still bases itself in the science. Ecologists and environmentalists aim to save and protect what they would call “the natural world” or “the natural environment”. Their aim is the *survival* of all of that which they use these terms to encompass, and so their perspective, like all survivalist perspectives, is at root a *utilitarian* perspective. Since ecologists and environmentalists generally make the abstractions “nature”, “ecosystem”, “environment” into higher powers over themselves, theirs is a communitarian utilitarianism, they seek what is useful to the imagined “natural communities” for which they fight rather than for themselves as individuals. This does not make their perspective any less *utilitarian*, but rather simply more *miserabilist* in its embrace of self-sacrifice and personal guilt.

Of course, *one* of the ways that I relate to the myriad of beings that surround me is in terms of how I can *use* them to help me to further my own aims, to accomplish my own endeavors, to meet my needs and carry out my desires. I am, after all, capable of taking *willful* action to shape my surroundings so that I can better create my life as I choose. And there are situations where, in order to maintain my life pleasantly, I would have to shape my surrounding more intensely. For example, if I lived on a high desert mesa, I would need to weave significantly humanized aspects into my surroundings, creating some infrastructure to deal with the harshness. In other words I would adjust the immediate environment to meet my needs – *as all living beings do*. And this continual adjustment among various beings is the *activity*, the interrelating and interweaving, that you and I call *environment*. Not a “community”, not a “system”, but something closer to a freely improvised dance, a flux. Human beings appear to be able to take advantage of possibilities for adjusting their surroundings that go beyond that of other living beings. To deal with the wind problem that can exist on a high desert mesa, though trees are naturally sparse here, a person could plant and care for concentrated stands of trees or

large shrubs, compatible with an arid climate, that could act as a wind block, provide shade and the like. This would change the environment, but might it not *enhance* it?

But I am too vast in my dreams and my desires to make survival and the utilitarian the dominant ways in which I encounter my worlds, that myriad beings, the phenomena, that surround me and flow into and out of me in a mad and merry dance. Instead, for me survival serves no other purpose than to let me live *to the full*, and utility simply lets me move beyond need into the *joy of life*. The primary way in which I want to encounter my worlds is that of *poetic wonder*, what the surrealists have called *the marvelous*. Poetic wonder arises when I encounter other unique beings that I experience as outside of me and when I discover inner realms that take me to that ecstatic (beyond *stasis*) place of self-forgetfulness. And these are not separate experiences, but interweave with and feed each other. This dance of encounter and discovery is the process by which I actually make my worlds my own. The origin of poetic wonder in *me* as a unique one and in my specific, unique encounters with what surrounds me guarantees its openness.

The openness of poetic wonder, its origin in me as a unique individual and its relational quality make it an ideal basis for an ever-changing, expanding, exploratory and experimental creating of meaning and values, a terrain for an ongoing *search*, always satisfying, but never satisfied, that can include the meeting of material needs in passing as part of the fuller enjoyment, without becoming subservient to survival. Unlike religion, it is grounded in the worlds of sensual experience. It doesn't push wonder, joy and ecstasy into an invisible realm, but bases them in actual relations what I develop here, in this world of the senses. These relationships can spark imagination, the ability to see beyond what is here, but that beyond is not a separate realm. Rather it is an expression of the ways I can play with my worlds and my self. William Blake put it well in these lines:

*"To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour."
("Auguries of Innocence")*

I can describe this sense of poetic wonder – this playful interweaving of myself into and out of all that I experience, taking it fully into myself, forgetting myself in it, and letting it go again – in another way: I am in love with all the myriads of wild beings I encounter. And how could I want to harm those I love? How could I not want to enhance, play with, dance with, those I love? What I might call an anarchist or an egoist way of encountering the

wild worlds all around us, what I would certainly call *my own* way of doing so, is precisely this relation of poetic wonder and ecstatic love, of losing and finding myself in this orgiastic dance of wild be(com)ings through which I create my worlds.

*

*As the sun settles behind the trees,
a mild breeze plays its strange atonal music
through the branches.
The buzzing of various insects,
the calls of different birds,
and here and there a chirping squirrel
throw in their harmonies.*

*It is easy to weary ourselves
in the pursuit of vast pleasures.
The poisons that invite us
to broad and crazy dreams,
to brilliant caverns hidden
deep inside of us
that provide us
with the most exquisite wonder,
also drain our bodies,
use us up and wear us out.*

*But I don't fear this draining.
What is life if not a treasure
to be used up in living?
Those who hoard their treasures
miss the point,
missing out on the enjoyment
of their wealth.
All treasure is meant
to be consumed,
used up, devoured, destroyed.
Excess is the better part of prudence.
So I couldn't care less
that I wear myself out,
when I do it
with such exquisite beauty,
such marvelous taste.
Someday I will die,
but when I die,
I will have lived marvels.*

Recommended Reading

Anarchy and Ecstasy by John Moore

The Spell of the Sensuous by David Abrams

Why I Am Not a Primitivist by Jason Mcguinn

(Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed, #51,
Spring/Summer 2001)

Egoist Perspectives on Civilization

(Enemy Combatant Publications)

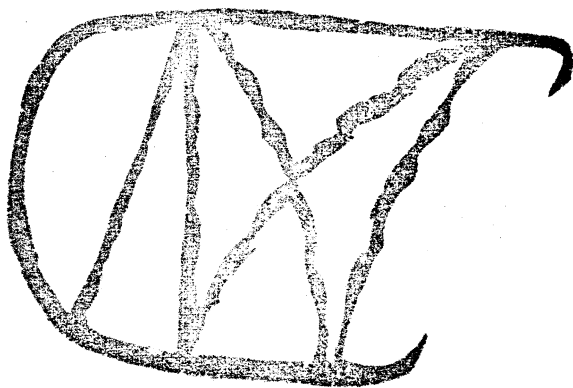
Natural History by Benjamin Peret

(forthcoming from Enemy Combatant Publications)

This pamphlet collects new writings exploring the convergence of egoism and the non-human world. Exploring primitivism, identity, ecology, rural life, and other topics, this collection seeks to complicate the widely-held perception that egoism lacks an engagement with the non-human world.

What will hopefully come across with the range of voices in these essays is that egoism operates, like all ideas, as an *influence*, and that when any single set of ideas becomes codified into a *position*, it loses, in becoming political, its anarchistic vigor. Moreover, when our egoist ideas cross-pollinate with experiences in the non-human world, then our critique of civilization, domestication, and our existence under contemporary society can explode into an expansiveness that exceeds ourselves – nothing short of such a *corrosive consciousness* can destroy the walls and character armor so carefully welded into our minds and our worlds by aeons of authority.

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